

ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS TRIAL LAWYERS

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REPORT

LOS ANGELES

SUMMER 2019

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Sabrina H. Strong

Civility among lawyers is a topic I have wrestled with both inside and outside the courtroom. In this age of coarseness and division, the standards that we aspire to—that we're held to—have never been more important. As incoming president of the ABTL's Los Angeles Chapter a year ago, I recognized an opportunity and a responsibility to put these concerns into action. My goal: Find new, meaningful ways to promote civility.

I know that this cause is hardly new. I've lost count of how many lawyer organizations and courts have adopted civility guidelines—unfortunately to little effect, as best I can tell. But giving up is not an option.

So, as part of assembling the 2018-2019 officer and committee team, I created a new Civility Committee. I invited Michael Mallow to serve as chair and Celeste Brecht to serve as vice-chair, and they eagerly accepted. When they in turn invited board members to participate, about a third of our board volunteered—a sign, I think, of just how many of us take this issue to heart. By the end of the committee's first meeting, they already had a long list of projects to pursue.

You are reading one of those projects: a special, extra-long issue of the Los Angeles Chapter's ABTL Report devoted entirely to civility. The diverse, distinguished authors here explore the sources of incivility, address the problems it causes, ask whether it works (spoiler: it doesn't), place it in the context of lawyer well-being and mindfulness, provide judicial perspectives, and suggest ways to counter it with civility.

We have no illusions that this issue, or any of our other projects, will suddenly tame our profession's worst excesses. We know that some lawyers are fundamentally unwilling to display—or may be incapable of displaying—the kind of professionalism we take for granted in ABTL members. But we firmly believe that there are many other lawyers, particularly younger lawyers, who may yet be willing to examine whether they want to live their professional lives mired in toxicity. As you read this issue, we hope you will think of ways that you can help us reach them.

No matter how quixotic this quest may be, we must stand up and be counted among those who wish to preserve an ethical code that makes us proud to be lawyers.

Please read, think, and speak about this. The future of our profession depends on it.

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